

Hoewel het boek dus enkele gebreken kent, biedt het dankzij de uitgebreide case-studies, een mooie blik in vroegmodern Frankfurt.

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Michelle T. King, *Between Birth and Death. Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) 250 p. ISBN 978-0-8047-8893-9.

The practice of infanticide, and especially female infanticide, is one which is often looked upon with great horror from a Western point of view. The general perception about this practice is that female infanticide is historically much more common in China than in other parts of the world. Existing historical studies mainly point at the Chinese patriarchal family system as an explanation. Moreover, even today Chinese sex ratios indicate a preference for boys, which makes some scholars believe that this kind of son preference is just a continuation of historical traditions. In other words, female infanticide is often connected and eternalized with Chinese culture because it is understood as a static cultural phenomenon, arising out of a gender bias and/or profound parental apathy.

King challenges this traditional belief of female infanticide being solely a Chinese practice by moving beyond an undifferentiated past of Chinese gender discrimination. She approaches the subject by placing the given historical relationship between female infanticide and Chinese culture at the center of her investigation by asking, "Just when and how did female infanticide become so Chinese?" (7). By doing so, King's investigation focuses on the perception, and not the practice, of female infanticide. Her book, therefore, includes an extensive analysis of the shift in the perception of female infanticide in China during the long nineteenth century. To tackle the goals of her study King uses the image of series of ever-wider concentric circles of concerned adults surrounding a Chinese infant girl to structure her research. Her main motivation for doing so is that she believes that the scholarly focus on female infanticide is too narrow and should be expanded by encompassing more than the sex and number of victims. Instead, a newborn daughter should be seen as an entity always surrounded by a wide array of historical actors interested in her fate.

In the first chapter sketches the inner most circle surrounding an infant. The roles of mothers, midwives, mothers-in-law and other female bystanders are all illustrated by thought-provoking examples. They all seem to play an important role in the decision-making process to eventually commit infanticide. Especially illuminating is the unique example of the woman Ye's description of her own

experience of infanticide. It illustrates the many dimensions related to decisions regarding infanticide, such as inauspicious births, deformities, family circumstances, and general poverty. By elaborating on all these dimensions King demonstrates that not solely sex, but a wide array of factors would eventually lead to infanticide.

The second chapter moves outwards to the circle of men. The main character in this chapter is the school teacher Yu Zhi, who advocated against infanticide. Firstly, this implies a certain scale on which infanticide existed and was culturally acceptable for some. However, according to King the fact that preventing infanticide is only seen as one of the many good works to improve the moral behavior in society is more revealing. This finding suggests that despite the many moral texts and plays about infanticide, it was certainly a consistent, but not necessarily special, moral concern. The next two chapters build on this observation by demonstrating how Western writings and interpretations of Chinese sources were not predominantly about the social practice of infanticide per se. Moreover, King claims that if one looks closely at the overall trajectory of the nineteenth-century history of female infanticide it has much in common with other markers of Chinese barbarity, grotesqueness or exoticism. In other words, when female infanticide moved from Chinese historical contexts to Western ones, a Eurocentric perspective caused prejudged interpretations which became dominant in the end.

In the fifth chapter the author reveals in what ways old and new Chinese ideas about infanticide, together with an increasing European influence, mixed. She clearly illustrates how the Chinese tried to find native, not foreign, solutions to the problems of infanticide. However, as a result of Western secular ideas about science and women a new perspective emerged in which the life of each girl became of central importance for China's survival on the international stage during the late nineteenth century. Therefore, King argues that in this context female infanticide transformed from a local, moral, philanthropic issue into a cross-cultural, political, scientific issue of international concern. In her conclusion King draws a parallel between these issues and present-day Chinese families. This part, however, is much less elaborate than the previous chapters. It also excludes any comparisons with other parts of the world, for example India.

This type of book will always be open to criticism for using post-colonial theory to explain why female infanticide became so Chinese. Furthermore, while King demonstrates clearly how and why female infanticide became Chinese during the translation process, it is still puzzling how European cases of infanticide were made invisible. Perhaps this would be a fruitful topic for future research. Yet on balance, the richness of the sources within the text in combination with a clear writing style provide for a convincing account of how our perception of Chinese female infanticide was, and still is, constructed. Likewise, it gives a glimpse of the

often neglected emotional complexity behind skewed sex ratios which accompanied layered decision-making of Chinese parents committing infanticide.

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J. Dumolyn en T. Mampaey, *België. Een geschiedenis van onderuit*. (Berchem: EPO, 2012) 254 p. ISBN: 978-94-91297-34-2.

België. Een geschiedenis van onderuit beoogt geschiedschrijving anders te behandelen dan een bepaalde aanpak met de klemtoon op de rol van de machthebbers in de geschiedenis. Het werk wil de 'geschiedenis van de kleine man' belichten, al past hier een kritische noot. Dat de eerstgenoemde aanpak ooit de hoofdstroming in de geschiedschrijving was, zal niemand ontkennen; dat het nog steeds die is van de huidige generatie historici is betwistbaar.

Het werk waaraan 15 auteurs een bijdrage hebben geleverd kan worden verdeeld in twee grote delen met enerzijds de focus op drie sociale groepen (arbeiders, boeren en leerkrachten) en anderzijds de focus op een waaier van thema's (de levensstandaard, de volkscultuur, het geloof en de strijd voor sociale en politieke erkenning). Elk van deze thema's wordt chronologisch behandeld en dit over een periode van ietwat minder dan 1000 jaar. Het behoeft geen betoog dat een dergelijke aanpak in een boek van 244 pagina's niet alle thema's kan behandelen (zo vinden we er relatief weinig terug over migranten) en onmogelijk anders dan een weergave van een aantal momentopnamen kan zijn, zoals Jan Dumolyn ook terecht aanhaalt in de inleiding. Zo zal bv. in hoofdstuk 4, 'De strijd voor sociale en politieke erkenning' vlot overgestapt worden van Damme (1280) naar Gent (1477), Seraing (1879), Leuven (1902), Gent (1970), waardoor andere periodes onderbelicht of zelfs niet vermeld worden. Dat doet echter niets af aan de waarde van de periodes die wel behandeld worden; deze brengen (en dat geldt ook voor alle bijdragen) soms verrassend nieuwe elementen aan, geven originele getuigenissen en kunnen inspirerend werken voor de lezer die zich verder in de materie wil verdiepen. Zo bieden de bijdragen over de volkscultuur, over het geloof en de levensstandaard eveneens een waaier aan interessante getuigenissen en documenten.

De editors verantwoorden hun aanpak in de inleiding, tegelijk een must om dit werk goed te begrijpen. Ze zijn zich ervan bewust dat de definitie van 'de kleine man' (of ietwat verder 'de gewone mensen') niet zo eenvoudig is, en een intuïtief aanvoelen daarom nog geen goede definitie oplevert. Jan Dumolyn erkent het probleem en stelt: we 'kiezen .. voor een vage omschrijving: de grote massa van